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AL QAEDA, CALIPHATE AND ANTONIO GRAMSCI:
ONE STATE, ONE REGION, THEN ONE WORLD?

by

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Preface

I took on this topic to explore three thoughts. First, I chose this topic to better educate myself regarding the particulars of the most dangerous transnational terror group. Second, I intended to approach an evaluation of al Qaeda in a different manner than seen in other research; you, the reader will decide my success. Finally, I somewhat stumbled across the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and was intrigued by his thinking in regards to hegemony and ideology, and decided to explore how those ideas may apply to a transnational terrorist organization.

This project would not have been complete without guidance and assistance from Dr. MacCuish in redirecting my research focus. Dr. MacCuish also provided extremely helpful suggestions and resources to develop my scattered ideas that finally started to adhere together. In addition, Lieutenant Commander James “Gue” Corlett was an invaluable resource who pointed me toward books and people I never would have come across. He, too, was researching al Qaeda, and his review of my paper was crucial to its completion. I also want to thank Major Steve “Cheech” Marin for providing the outside eyes on my paper; he pointed out where the ideas were just too confusing and suggested the changes needed to make this paper more understandable. Finally, I have eternal gratitude to my wife and three daughters who kept us all together even though we were 150 miles apart. Their sacrifice in agreeing to the 10-month separation allowed me to focus on my studies while still affording them continuity in home, school and work.

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to discuss how al Qaeda is organized, conducts operations and constantly manages relationships in comparison to the ideas and thoughts of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci was a prolific Italian Socialist writer whose thoughts on using ideology to gain and exploit hegemony may help explain the words and actions of al Qaeda. The analysis determined that al Qaeda uses a strong promotion of its philosophy to create a change in hegemony via a culture focused on uniting Muslims against a primary enemy (United States). Al Qaeda also supports various education efforts which may provide foot soldiers. Finally, al Qaeda continuously seeks like-minded groups and exploits all means to communicate to the masses in order to motivate action.

To counter, the United States should take several specific actions. First, America and its allies should use more effective human intelligence alongside high-tech methods to identify and neutralize al Qaeda leaders, as well as continue intercepting and disrupting communications. Second, the United States should continue the use of mass media to counter al Qaeda's message to offset their radical ideology and recruit Islamic experts to respond to and debate al Qaeda's extreme interpretations of the Quran. Next, Western military members should be educated more on Muslim and Arabic culture. Finally, governments should be more proactive in evaluating educational systems to ensure exposure to other views and monitor messages from religious leaders. Coupled with continued military and nation-building activities in Afghanistan, these actions should contribute significantly to the demise and defeat of al Qaeda.

Introduction

Al Qaeda and other radical Islamist terrorists are representatives of a new kind of terrorist – one motivated by religious fanaticism and with global ambitions that they plainly believe are achievable. And only we stand in the way.

—Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates

Al Qaeda is a multi-dimensional, dispersed and influential terrorist group that takes its form from Sunni traditions of Islam. In fact, the ideals and principles espoused by this group and its leaders stem from the success of the Muslim caliphate in medieval times, following the death of Muhammed until the Christian Crusades began in the eleventh century.¹ Much of al Qaeda's rhetoric, both positive and negative, has its roots in both the power of historical Islamic empires and the failures of these empires, mainly at the hands of Christian powers.

The later powerful Christian states drew their strength not solely from their religion; interestingly, their warrant was given from the secular nation of peoples and their leaders, rather than the official blessings of the Catholic church, for example. To be honest, of course, is to acknowledge the influence that religion contributed to these quests; however, victories were achieved not only in the name of the church, but also the monarchy or superiority of the Western (and, self-described enlightened) form of government.

As Western governments grew, transformed and revolutionized, they took on different characteristics. Both the writings of Karl Marx and actions of Vladimir Lenin had significant impact on the relationship between governments and the people. The idea that a political structure could be created from the social strata of workers in the Industrial Age was a lynchpin to the rise of Socialist revolutions. No longer was the political party or national leadership only for the elite. Rather, Lenin advocated training of “practical workers to become political leaders”

in the Socialist movement.² These leaders, then, would be postured to help lead the workers in spreading the ideology throughout society. This connection would ideally create the conditions that are central to Antonio Gramsci's picture of Socialistic hegemony—changing the nation's culture and power structure to one controlled and dictated by the lesser class.³

Transforming a nation's culture and power structure in order to effect momentous shifts in beliefs and values could arguably be described as an idea that radical Islam shares with Socialism. An examination of parallels between al Qaeda's desire to motivate Muslims to join *jihad* in an effort to bring back the Islamic caliphate could be compared to Gramsci's views on ideology and hegemony as a "revolutionary struggle."⁴ The analysis could yield findings that may bring insight to an approach that may improve the effectiveness of meeting the challenges that radical Islamic insurgent groups present. Given its decentralized organizational structure, morphing goals, and associations of convenience, al Qaeda's methods are designed to create the conditions to spread popular support for their movement and gain control of government after government to establish a global caliphate; how does a modern superpower contend with this difficult adversary?

Following September 11, 2001, the United States led a coalition of nations into Afghanistan to eliminate al Qaeda and its safe haven by removing the Taliban from power. Al Qaeda, its leadership and organization survived and spoke out to inspire Muslims to join the *jihad*. After invading Iraq, the United States and coalition nations met both Iraqi insurgents and foreign fighters inspired or motivated by al Qaeda on the battlefield. Following years of conflict, a relative sense of peace and security has come to Iraq as the insurgency has been defeated. Al Qaeda, its leadership and organization survived and again spoke out to inspire Muslims to join the *jihad*. America's leaders must re-evaluate al Qaeda from another perspective in an effort to

define new strategies, operational ideas and tactics to defeat a persistent enemy that uses a broad spectrum of irregular warfare tactics alongside a societal approach to maintain visibility and replenish its funding and forces.

An analytical assessment of al Qaeda using a Gramscian lens suggest changes needed to cultivate better partnerships within and outside the United States government as well as alter the approach to neutralize al Qaeda. This discussion is particularly important when discussing how this decentralized terror group is organized, conducts operations and constantly manages internal and external relationships. In this paper, the assessment will be in the form of a case study that first gives background on the genesis of al Qaeda, then advances through the basic tenets of a society that Gramsci believes must be transformed to effect hegemonic change. These tenets are philosophy, culture, education and relationships. The main analysis follows, outlining how Gramsci's ideas might be reflected in al Qaeda's philosophy, culture, education and relationships.

In general terms, Gramsci can be thought of as a Socialist who believed power was attained and held through "subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that served to perpetuate all repressive structures" in a state.⁵ To break this hold, a new power structure needed to be established through infiltrating a society or state with a specified culture, philosophy, language and education that permeates every aspect of daily life, thus creating a common sense and purpose among the communal culture. This common sense would then lead to an uprising to change the conditions under which people lived, an uprising led by intellectuals developed from the rising class. Intellectuals, in Gramscian thought, would develop relationships among the classes and foster the common goal.

This case study is approached from the perspective of Islam as the driving force for al Qaeda's ideal society as compared to the political and social change Gramsci sees in attaining an ideal Socialist state. No description or analysis of the specific organizational structure of al Qaeda is presented, as other publications have covered the topic in sufficient detail. The purpose of this analysis is to offer an analysis of al Qaeda's desire for establishment and expansion of an Islamic caliphate to govern the entire spectrum of an individual's life. The conclusion will present suggestions that have the potential to counter the efforts of al Qaeda, which may create circumstances essential for collaborative endeavors within and outside the United States government, as well as the influence that non-governmental organizations could produce in conjunction with or in place of governmental action. The goal in all actions, of course, is to create a better state of peace that every state and international association seeks.

Antonio Gramsci's Thought and Theory

No mass action is possible unless the mass itself is convinced of the ends it wants to reach and the methods to be applied.

—Antonio Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci was born into a poor family on the Italian island of Sardinia in 1891. He was unique in his village in that he was literate. During childhood, Gramsci's brother sent socialist pamphlets, a major influence which helped shaped his views. The young man did well enough in school to earn a scholarship to the University of Turin, where he studied for a number of years before exchanging his studies for a life in politics.⁶ He was the leading force in creating the weekly Italian Socialist newspaper *Ordine Nuovo*, and became known as one of Italy's foremost thinkers and writers on the Socialist movement. In fact, Gramsci even spent some time

in the Soviet Union, discussing his views on Socialism with party leaders and experiencing first-hand how the system was implemented.

The rise of fascism in Italy brought suspicion on Socialists in general, and Gramsci in particular. Considered a threat to those in power, and he was jailed in 1926. He was a very prolific author, writing his “Prison Notebooks” which outlined his thoughts and ideas on myriad subjects in Socialism and society. Although not allowed to read Socialist works, Gramsci did study Italian and European history in prison, among other subjects. He had a remarkable memory, and his references to Socialist writers were almost always verbatim. Gramsci’s writings consumed 33 notebooks his sister smuggled out of prison following his death in 1937.⁷

Gramsci’s most important contribution was in the concept of hegemony, a “permeation *throughout* society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality,” particularly in terms of economic domination as well as intellectual and moral leadership.⁸ Hegemony was gained by a class by using certain techniques. By building relationships with other groups in society that are potential allies, a class would develop some level of consensus for action. To further its goals, this class would then take action to discredit or create question about the abilities of the opposition. Then, through active political movement the rising class gains power to dominate governance and create conditions favorable to its members.⁹ In general, Gramsci believes hegemony is gained by translating philosophy between social or economic classes and changing the culture to that of the rising class. To accomplish this goal, the rising class infiltrates the education system and creates relationships that can enforce conformity in a language and practice common to all.

Philosophy

Gramsci believed that “a man always belongs to a certain grouping, and precisely to that of all the social elements who share the same ways of thinking and working.”¹⁰ Within his class, a man will share a certain view of the world and how people and processes should work. However, when a man does not seek to learn why he possesses a particular worldview, he may be unable to adjust historical knowledge of philosophy to apply to more modern issues. And if one cannot apply past understandings to contemporary problems, how can a philosophy be transposed between classes?

The difference in philosophy among the social and economic strata of a nation or society is compared by Gramsci to the intellectuals and “simple people” belonging to the Catholic Church. He describes the church as integrating the lesser people via “politics” and the leaders using “iron discipline” to keep the intellectuals in check. The lower class is not provided the opportunity to develop more sophisticated philosophical thought, and intellectuals kept their power via religious orders. The solution to this situation, as Gramsci sees it, is to embrace Socialism because of the desire to bring simple people “to a higher view of life.” In essence, the political movement is furthered via the intellectual development of the common masses.¹¹

Culture

Development of intellectuals and spreading philosophies across classes in society has the expressed purpose of changing a nation’s culture. The thought follows, then, that the change in culture will lead to a change in politics and governance, with those in power subjugated to others that desire dominance. Gramsci personally attempted to create intellectuals organic to the working class by a number of common means, most notably his weekly publication and involvement in politics. His desire wasn’t simply to produce thinkers; he sought to raise the

consciousness of all workers. Only through the permeation of Socialist ideas and higher thinking would action take place to change the politics of a nation and, subsequently, the culture of a society.¹²

Education

Perhaps the single most significant change to a society proposed by Gramsci was total reform of the education system, though he took the concept to a new level. Rather than leave school selection and attendance to a child's parents, "The unitary school requires that the State should take over the expenses of maintaining the scholars which today fall on the family. ...The whole task of educating and forming the younger generation becomes public instead of private, since only in this way can it involve the whole generation without distinctions of group or caste."¹³

The budget of schools, at that time borne by families, should be the responsibility of the government and expanded to include more buildings, teachers and equipment, according to Gramsci. Plus, schools would not only be educational institutions; students would be housed, fed and totally immersed in learning during their waking hours. Education would be formal in the classroom, informal between students and dedicated teachers after hours.¹⁴ The purpose of a unitary school was to provide a consistent education to a society's children, giving common instruction to create "a solid social and homogeneous moral conscience."¹⁵ Only after unitary school would individuals be singled out for further scholarship or practical training.

Through a comprehensive education system, Gramsci hoped to foster further cohesion between learning and the work environment, "between intellectual and industrial work."¹⁶ Why does the education system have such importance in a Socialist system? Vladimir Lenin: "We must train our Social-Democratic practical workers to become political leaders, able to guide all

the manifestations of this all-round struggle, able at the right time to ‘dictate a positive programme of action’ for the aroused students, the discontented Zemstvo people, the incensed religious sects, the offended elementary schoolteachers, etc., etc.”¹⁷ Education was the basis for long-term, persistent change.

Relationships

Gramsci presupposes that relationships within a class and between classes hold the key to creating common sense, an idea of shared knowledge among people in a society. He states an “individual does not enter into relations with other men in opposition to them but through an organic unity with them...”¹⁸ Relationships are not passive, either; they are active if man is to have an impact on his environment and society. Contributing to the development of other individuals within a class is considered a responsibility of intellectuals. Enhancing one’s social class is also required of intellectuals, especially if working toward the establishment of social, educational and political hegemony in a nation. To achieve these two goals, intellectuals must continually develop not only their own knowledge but also their relationships with others. Through relationships, intellectuals will be able to harness social hegemony and exercise political governance.¹⁹

Conformity

Gramsci viewed conformity more important on a macro scale rather than in unique social or economic groups. For example, “a tradesman feels *obliged* to stand by another tradesman, a manufacturer by another manufacturer, etc., but the tradesman does not yet feel solidarity with the manufacturer...[but] one becomes aware that one’s own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too.”²⁰ The crucial aspect is not so much

cohesion within the faction but between sections of a society such that the change in ideology and hegemony creates a lasting change in culture.

Language

Gramsci stated, “If it is true that any language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture, it will also be true that the greater or lesser complexity of a person’s conception of the world can be judged from his language.”²¹ He believed that a limited grasp of language led to a limited ability to understand the world around a person. In particular, one with restricted linguistic abilities would be hard pressed to comprehend different modes of thinking, i.e., a northern Italian attempting to understand the underlying meanings in a conversation with a southern Italian or Sicilian. The limits placed on an individual due to knowledge of only one dialect within a nation would certainly form a boundary in terms of interests outside the immediate environment, and could hamper efforts to change ideology in a person, a region or a nation. To paraphrase Gramsci, one’s great culture can be translated into another’s great language, but dialect cannot do the same.²²

Analysis of Al Qaeda

The hearts of Muslims are filled with hatred towards the United States of America and the American president...our people in the Arabian Peninsula will sen[d] him messages with no words because he does not understand them. We believe that the American army in Saudi Arabia came to separate between the Muslims and the people for not ruling in accordance with Allah’s wish.

—Osama bin Laden

This analysis of al Qaeda as compared to Gramscian thought and action is broken into several sections containing the most significant areas of analysis. The purpose of each section is to examine each aspect of al Qaeda’s efforts to change power structures and culture to gain

hegemony; further comparisons on lesser points are in Appendix 2. While the concept of overtly creating a dominant class is generally standard in insurgencies, al Qaeda is unique in its transnational construction. In fact, the terror group may be also using covert actions to bring about the change they seek. For example, the messages broadcast by al Qaeda serve two purposes: first, to educate the masses in regards to their philosophy and actions, and second, to establish a common knowledge base for what the group stands for and expects from its members. Al Qaeda is working toward its stated goal of “the society we hope to create” through an approach that uses both force and beliefs.²³

Philosophy

Different groups in a society or nation generally have different philosophies on all aspects of an existence—how one should act, look, relate with others, even the role of religion and government. Gramsci’s idea of philosophy is fascinating in that he not only takes into account the individuals of a society but also their shared history as well. In particular, “one cannot be a philosopher, that is, have a critically coherent conception of the world, without being aware of its history, of the phases of development it represents and of the fact that it stands in contradiction to other conceptions or elements of them.”²⁴ But knowledge of the past should not be a prison for one’s mind. Gramsci goes on to explain that historical reference is expected, but problems and issues of the present require forward-looking problem-solving, as opposed to being “incapable of complete historical independence.”²⁵ In a struggle of philosophies and ideology, he espouses a process in which principles can be conveniently transposed between classes—or, as applied to al Qaeda, may be common between the different sects of Islam.

While al Qaeda’s beliefs are rooted in Sunni Islam, bin Laden sees the purpose of his organization not solely linked to defending the Arabian Peninsula and its Muslims against

infidels. His convictions are deeper than that and have a much wider reach—and, he hopes, a much wider appeal to Muslims worldwide. A primary philosophy of al Qaeda is its grasp of *jihad* and the role it plays in their beliefs. To bin Laden, *jihad* is not confined to the inner struggle of the mind, the defensive struggle for freedom and survival, nor even a struggle between states. In his own words, he states, “This battle is not between al-Qaeda (sic) and the US. This is a battle against the global Crusaders.”²⁶ The interesting distinction lies in what the purpose of this philosophy may be. Could bin Laden be harkening back to the first six centuries of Islam? This period was significant in that the religion “provided the ideological framework for state and society, a source of legitimacy and authority,” and the Caliphs were seen as “‘commander of the believers,’ whose task it was to defend and spread the faith and assure that society was governed by God’s law.”²⁷ Many recognize similarities between al Qaeda’s philosophies and that historic period.

To spread al Qaeda’s philosophy, many videos of the training camps in Afghanistan were available during the 1990s. Calling on unity in a holy cause, bin Laden and his associates can be heard espousing historical and contemporary insults and affronts to Islam against a background of “masked followers training...holding up black flags and chanting in Arabic, ‘fight evil!’...bin Laden implies that there will be more action against the United States: ‘The victory of Islam is coming...’” These fighters demonstrate their abilities with weapons and explosives, and even bin Laden is shown firing rounds from an automatic rifle.²⁸ Al Qaeda’s militant view permeated Arab media and elevated the group from ragtag *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan to, in their own view, the rightful defenders of the faith.

Curiously, no real typecast of al Qaeda’s general membership can be isolated to determine the foundations of individual philosophy. The leaders of the group have varying education,

ranging from bin Laden's unremarkable post-secondary management and economics studies to Zawahiri's training as a general surgeon to a past military advisor's degree in psychology.²⁹ Research is certain of one aspect, however: only "the most committed, most trustworthy and most capable operatives" were recruited as al Qaeda members in the 1990s, a distinct honor among radical Islamists.³⁰

What may be important is al Qaeda's leadership structure and interpretation of Islam. Bin Laden uses a traditional executive council called a *shura* to help with decisionmaking, and another committee issues rulings on Islamic law, or *fatwas*.³¹ Behind this structure is the desire to assimilate membership from multiple nationalities in an effort to spread the group's influence by promoting its philosophies. Forging relationships and cooperative partnering can serve the dual purpose of spreading ideology and weakening the ties between America and the rest of the world.

Another interesting aspect of al Qaeda's philosophy is the expansion of their fight to a global cause. The reasoning is based on one main motivation: to create a foundation of an Islamic state. Because al Qaeda (literally translated as "the base") started with the *mujahedeen* defeating a superpower in Afghanistan, and saw first tacit then tangible approval from the Taliban, the establishment of a pseudo-Caliph state had been accomplished (bin Laden even referred to Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, as a caliph³²). With a base of operations and a government that he endorsed, bin Laden had the beginnings of his quest to spread fundamentalist Islam worldwide, hence the declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders in February 1998.³³ The *fatwa* issued was meant to show solidarity and give direction to Muslims everywhere to fight not a local, limited battle against unjust governments on the Arabian Peninsula but a worldwide conflict against the United States.

But why would a comparatively small consortium of terrorist groups now try to defeat another, presumably stronger superpower? The motivation, the philosophy espoused by this faction, was in response to the actions by America since 1990: the presence of American military on the Arabian Peninsula—Saudi Arabia, in particular—and the support Israel enjoys from the United States. What makes al Qaeda’s statement even more significant is that it cites the Quran (“And fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together”) and dehumanizes America and Israel by calling them pagans.³⁴ Conveniently, this ideology neglects other Surah in the Quran that considers Christians and Jews as believers in the same book of Abraham and Moses. The difference that many fundamentalist Muslims see, of course, is the belief that both religions “had gone astray and had followed false doctrines. Both religions were therefore superseded, and replaced by Islam, the final and perfect revelation in God’s sequence.”³⁵ The primary philosophy for this loose conglomeration had been established with concrete directions that all Muslims should follow: attack and kill Americans, both military and civilians—warfighters and innocents—as they are all infidels and must be expelled from holy lands.

The difficulty in comparing al Qaeda’s ideology with Gramsci’s ideas about the influence of philosophy is its transitory nature and selective adherence. For example, bin Laden’s rhetoric about Palestine ebbs and flows according to the message he is trying to promote. On the one hand, he talks about the Palestinian blood spilled by Israelis, while on the other he does not provide materiel or manpower to help them fight.

Another example of contradictory philosophy is in regards to Iraq. Prior to the invasion into Kuwait, bin Laden did not view Saddam Hussein as a just ruler according to Islamic tradition. Upon Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, bin Laden offered his assistance to Saudi authorities to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait, only to be rejected in favor of the coalition headed

by the United States. In the years after Iraq was expelled from Kuwait, bin Laden then took up the cause of Iraqi Muslims by speaking out against the effects of the international embargo against Iraq on its people, particularly children. After the first 17 months of Operation Iraqi Freedom, bin Laden recognized Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's declaration of loyalty by making Zarqawi the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, and supported the insurgency against the coalition led by the United States.³⁶ The lack of a consistent and comprehensive philosophy by al Qaeda leadership could lead to one of two outcomes. Constant changes and refocus could portend difficulty in sustaining the cause, or al Qaeda may continue to expand membership because of flexible requirements to join the fight for Islamic hegemony.

Culture

Gramsci's idea of creating a new culture is more than simply innovative thought by elite intellectuals put into action by coercion or force. He also discusses the requirement of the innovative thought spreading through popularity and common thinking, making the new culture part of the daily life in society. The method of acculturation to a new philosophy requires contact between intellectuals and the "simple people" so that the new culture becomes part of everyday life.³⁷ Gramsci put forth that the contact between intellectuals and common people creates an understanding of the new culture and helps the transition to a new hegemony. The communication provides intellectuals with understanding of common problems and helps them harmonize solutions implemented by all of society. Al Qaeda's leaders could arguably fit the description of "intellectuals" and are promoting their belief that Islam solves individual, family and societal problems. The crucial issues are, then, the methods they are using to change culture and whether they can be effective in implementing this change.

The “Golden Age of Islam” continues to be a source of inspiration for Al Qaeda and their associates, a demonstration of the power that Islam once had. Mark A. Gabriel, in *Islam and Terrorism*, references *The Noble Quran*: “Fight them until there is no more *Fitnah* (disbelief and polytheism, i.e. worshipping others besides Allah) and the religion (worship) will be for Allah Alone [in the whole of the world].”³⁸ Muhammad took this instruction as guidance to spread Islam, by force if necessary. The desire of al Qaeda then follows this model: to reestablish complete Islamic hegemony in the Middle East and remove the infidels, especially America and the Jews. In bin Laden’s own words: “Our goal, therefore, is to free the land of Islam from unbelief, and to apply the law of God there.”³⁹ The culture of Islam is already present in most of this region; what bin Laden truly meant is that the goal is to institute al Qaeda’s version of the law of Allah in this area.

Bin Laden considers *jihad* a top priority, behind only one’s faith and commitment to prayer. Given the description above of Muhammad’s instructions from Allah, the understanding of al Qaeda’s overarching long-term goal is for Islam to predominate culture in the entire world. As Gramsci notes, intellectuals must be at the heart of any cultural change. Zawahiri understands the leadership role that intellectuals must take, as he notes in *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*: “Hence the importance of the issue of leadership in Islamic action in general and jihad in particular, and the community’s need for an educated, militant, and rational leadership that can guide it toward its goals through storms and hurricanes, with awareness and wisdom, without losing its way, striking out blindly, or reversing its course. ...The jihad movement must enable the Muslim community to participate with it in jihad, and believers will participate only if the mujahedeen’s slogans are comprehensible.”⁴⁰ Without intellectuals to lead the way, the society will not embrace and understand the change in culture desired by al Qaeda. Probably most

important in this respect, bin Laden and Zawahiri both have the uncanny knack for communicating effectively with all levels of society. Their ability to relate probably emanates from their time fighting as *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan, where they needed to not only direct local action but also work to secure funding internationally.

But the cultural change within the Middle East is only a beginning. Al Qaeda frequently cites Islamic revolutionary struggles elsewhere and ties them together in an attempt to form a coherent message about elemental change. Faisal Devji writes in *Landscapes of the Jihad*, “Indeed by moving between Bosnia and Afghanistan, Chechnya and Iraq, the jihad displays its fundamental indifference to these territories rather than consolidating them into a single Muslim geography. It ends by de-territorializing Islam together, since it is not one country or another that is important, but instead Islam itself as a global entity.”⁴¹

The migration of Muslims to Western nations has naturally spread the religion around the globe, and the normal human tendency when moving to another culture is to congregate with other like-minded people. As communities are built (physically and figuratively), the support structure of the neighborhood prospers and relationships between individuals and families flourish. Within Western nations, the perceived danger is that some Muslims may feel the pain of discrimination and become disillusioned with their surroundings and social circumstances, potentially creating a point of vulnerability within a nation that could be exploited. The self-identified idea of discrimination against Muslims in the United States was recognized by Stephen Schwartz, a newspaper reporter and author, in a written adaptation from a National Leadership Seminar speech he gave in 2004:

One can learn a lot about how the Saudi-backed Wahhabi establishment in the U.S. works by looking at how it came to speak for all of Islam in the American media. It did this by creating a set of organizations. One of the most prominent is called the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). This group was

allegedly set up to be a kind of a Muslim version of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League. That is, its stated goal was to protect Muslims against prejudice and stereotypes. I was working in the newsroom of the San Francisco Chronicle at the time, and I was struck by CAIR's approach with our reporters and editors. They didn't come to the newspaper offices and say, "We're Muslims; we're here now; this is our holy book; this is the life of our prophet Muhammad; these are the holidays we observe; this is what we believe in, and we'd like you to report these things accurately." Rather, they came and they said, "We are a minority and we suffer from discrimination. We suffer from hurtful stereotypes. We know that you are good liberal reporters, and that you want to avoid inflicting these stereotypes on us. So whenever you do a story on Islam, you should call us first and make sure it is correct." And, of course, that meant "correct" according to Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism.

This observation could infer that the attitude espoused by CAIR is an initial attempt to alter the culture of the media in terms of its perception of Islam in general and Muslims in particular. The culture of American mass media is to broadcast in common terms to American society, creating a special sensitivity to Muslims. While sensitivity to one's culture and beliefs is responsible, identifying a group as requiring special treatment could be construed as an attempt to initiate cultural change. To paraphrase Gramsci, the socializing of a new culture will propagate a truth that becomes part of the intellectual and moral order—precisely an al Qaeda goal, whether stated openly or not.⁴² The challenge is to make a message appealing enough on the basic level in society to effect changes in thinking and behavior, a truly Gramscian theory. Overtly, through its statements, messages and declarations, al Qaeda communicates its beliefs and religious tenets that promote fundamentalist Islamic thought and action.

In a materialistic world such as the West (as viewed by some in Islam), the migration of fundamentally-minded Muslims is confusing on one hand and understandable on another. Why would someone who rejects materialism move to a nation that embraces individual achievement, self-sufficiency and desire for success (and money)? Could that person be on a mission to foster change, first in a neighborhood, then a city, and so on? Federal officials in the United States

often talk in press conferences and interviews of “sleeper cells,” individuals who—when activated—will take terrorism to the heartland of America. Some, like Mark Gabriel, hold the view that “Muslims believe that war means deception, so lying is an important element of war in Islam.”⁴³ What better way into another culture than to present one face to your enemy while covertly disturbing societal norms?

By trying to identify with Muslims worldwide, al Qaeda is attempting to use their view of religion to effect cultural change. While their message implores an immediate call to action to “defend” Islam, the reality is that their extremist views with ever-present urgency are beginning to lose their appeal. In fact, one could argue that al Qaeda has lost their cultural connection with the majority of Muslims, partially as a consequence of their defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq, but more likely a result of their inability to connect with any nationalist movement. The fact that al Qaeda interprets the Quran and other “authoritative documents” in their self-described “correct” interpretation of the faith, with its subsequent insistence on spreading belief in Islam to the entire world, is probably what makes Muslims not identify with their cause and reject their aspirations to unite the world’s culture under the banner of Islam.

Most of the research for this paper refers to the common practice of Muslims identifying themselves as members of Islam first and a nation further down the list; but individuals still use nations as a sense of identity. If the culture of radical Islam were stronger, if it were something in which common practitioners identified, it would have a much more effective and widespread influence on ideals and behavior. On the contrary, al Qaeda’s message has been diluted, terrorist attacks by radical Islamists do not get the attention they once did (with notable exceptions such as the spectacular Mumbai, India, attacks in November 2008), and Muslims are becoming more open to debate about their religion in forums like The Doha Debates, sponsored by the Qatar

Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development.⁴⁴ In this sense, the ability of al Qaeda to extend their culture to other societies is questionable. Add to the equation globalization and the explosion of technologies to communicate, and al Qaeda's message is subject to further scrutiny, critique and dilution, all of which run counter to the ability to shape cultural change.

Education

Cultural change for al Qaeda may not be lost, however. Many believe that formal, strict education through *madrassas* may be the solution to developing adherents to its radical views of Islam. Gramsci appreciates the importance that education plays in daily life, then develops the concept further. His ideas about educating the next generation are a radical departure from generally accepted Western ideals, since he views total immersion, including a break from constant family interaction, as a basic requirement. Children will live in dormitories, eat in common dining rooms, and spend their days (and sometimes evenings) learning from their teachers and fellow students. Gramsci describes the effects of his unitary school as follows: "The advent of the unitary school marks the beginning of new relations between intellectual and industrial work, not only in school but in the whole of social life. The unitary principle will therefore be reflected in all organs of culture, transforming them and giving them a new content."⁴⁵ Apply this concept to Muslim families that send their children to *madrassas* with a focus on an Islamic fundamentalist's view for the next generation—either on the Arabian Peninsula or around the globe—and many would believe that the ingredients exist to continue the march backward to Islam in the Middle Ages.

Madrassas are Islamic faith-based secondary schools that center their educational program on studying the Quran and a curriculum of basics that, in some cases, haven't changed since the

14th Century. In less developed and more remote countries, *madrassas* may, in fact, be the only form of education available. The Western fear, of course, is that *madrassas* are a breeding ground for children that grow up to be terrorists. An article by Peter Bergen, *The Madrassa Scapegoat*, states that a “careful examination of the 79 terrorists responsible for five of the worst anti-Western terrorist attacks in recent memory—the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, the Africa embassy bombings in 1998, the September 11 attacks, the Bali nightclub bombings in 2002, and the London bombings on July 7, 2005—reveals that only in rare cases were *madrassa* graduates involved. All of those credited with masterminding the five terrorist attacks had university degrees, and none of them had attended a *madrassa*. Within our entire sample, only 11 percent of the terrorists had attended *madrassas*.”⁴⁶ While they laudably provide a solid foundation of ethics by teaching directly from the Quran, at the same time *madrassas* limit exposure to other cultures and regions. Their students do not necessarily learn the dynamics of inter-racial relations and the Western versions of democracy and freedom. Because of these restrictions, Westerners should not dismiss them as having a weak link to terrorism. On the contrary, particularly in Gramscian terms, *madrassas* should be acknowledged and modernized to reflect the current globalized world we live in and to ensure that, culturally, the students are taught basic ideals that fit into contemporary society.

Education on Gramsci’s terms may have an uncertain link to radical Islamist leaders in the al Qaeda model. Interestingly, however, Bergen’s study also determined that more than half of the terrorists studied had taken post-secondary classes, many in Western schools, and those with degrees earned them in technical disciplines.⁴⁷ As is typical with anarchists and revolutionaries, al Qaeda’s leadership and associates are usually white-collar or middle-class individuals who have become disenchanted and are looking for the path that will give them both purpose and, to

the desire of some, guaranteed salvation. The prospect of producing al Qaeda's ideal Islamic society through *madrassas* is not proven, although monitoring post-secondary education is highly recommended, as one could argue that highly educated and motivated members were required to pull off these spectacular attacks.

A more likely source of education and influence would be Islamic centers, mosques and imams. These authority figures have much more sway in the Islamic world than do schoolteachers, and their messages can be broadcast to the entire world on audio cassettes, compact discs, and even the internet. As the religious source for knowledge and direction in a believer's life, an imam can encourage action at the most personal level. The power that imams possess is immense and, if harnessed on a broad scale by al Qaeda, could produce significant change in the Islamic world's culture through its informal education of the masses.

Research for this paper has revealed that many leaders in radical Islam have been educated at Islamic universities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. A solid connection between that type of education cannot be claimed at this point. However, some leaders (such as Azzam) have cited the relationships they developed while attending university courses as having significant influence on their decision to join a radical Islamist group. Relationships, whether professional, personal or educational, are important to an individual's development and crucial to the ability of a group to survive and thrive.

Relationships

Gramsci's view of relationships is mainly in terms of intellectuals and the "human mass," as he explains: "If it [Marxism] asserts the need for contact between the intellectuals and the simple people it does so, not in order to limit scientific activity and maintain unity at the low level of the masses, but precisely in order to build an intellectual-moral *bloc* which makes

politically possible the intellectual progress of the masses and not only for a few groups of intellectuals.”⁴⁸ The purpose of this relationship, the connection of intellectuals and simple people, is to create a larger whole that has real power to implement change. The change comes as a result of a coherent philosophy provided through education of the masses, a common language, conformity with the group to a shared culture, and it is all brought together within a strong relationship. Again, Gramsci says,

Of course, it is necessary that the parties should be formed through individual enlistment...because, if the aim is to lead organically ‘the whole economically active mass’ it must be led not according to old schemes but by creating new ones, and the innovation cannot involve the mass, in its first stages, except by way of a *cadre* in whom the conception implicit in the human activity has already become to a certain extent actually coherent and systemic consciousness, precise and decided will.⁴⁹

This idea of relationships between intellectuals, as well as intellectuals and the masses, is important to al Qaeda in terms of their links with other groups as well as their association with recruits. The like-minded intellectuals that created al Qaeda established relationships at an early juncture. Their communication took many forms and their relationships were based on commonly held ideals that translated into action on many fronts, including propaganda, recruiting, fund-raising and training new recruits. When communicating between groups, however, the connection between intellectuals becomes clouded. For example, none of the research for this paper revealed any regular, cooperative communication between al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, Zawahiri has severely criticized them for their participation in the political process of many Arab nations.⁵⁰ Besides the personal relationships between intellectuals, the methods of communication have become burdensome and antiquated. With the knowledge that electronic communications are probably monitored very closely, bin Laden and his leadership team have all but abandoned phones, e-mail and other modern devices and

replaced them with couriers who memorize their messages to avoid written contact.⁵¹ In short, al Qaeda's communications with other intellectuals seems somewhat fragile and infrequent, negatively impacting their ability to spread their message, recruit participation and coordinate terrorist attacks. However, communication still effectively takes place, whether through intermediaries or by traveling to al Qaeda's leadership.

A relationship with the masses takes a different turn. The aforementioned messages from al Qaeda leadership in media outlets certainly can keep those interested in the cause aware of the group's survival, and radical Islamist intellectuals outside of al Qaeda that preach the personal *jihad* probably have an effect on those vulnerable to the message. In addition, social networking, whether online or face-to-face, likely contributes to recruitment and support of al Qaeda, although this tactic is difficult to measure.

One relationship that may support al Qaeda's movement and recruiting may be the *hawala* network. The *hawala* are individuals in the Islamic world that serve as middle men in the transfer of cash and comply with Islamic tradition in that they do not charge interest, the transactions are not taxed or recorded by banks, and they usually are hidden from government monitoring and control.⁵² The transfer of funds (and, potentially, messages) between cells, terrorist groups, and even government and supporting societies can occur in secret and will sustain any organization's survival. If this relationship is a primary means of survival for al Qaeda, penetrating and disrupting this activity could seriously damage their relationships both within the organization and between groups.

In Gramscian terms, relationships are crucial to hegemony and spreading ideology. Indeed, relationships within al Qaeda as well as the groups with which it associates are critical to its operations, its replenishment of men and materiel, even its survival. The impact to al Qaeda's

relationships can be reflected in the ability to broadcast and proselytize a coherent philosophy provided through education of the masses, a common language, and conformity within the group to a shared culture. Because the United States and its allies have myriad methods to intercept and monitor electronic communications, particularly in a relatively small geographic area such as the Middle East and South Asia (as compared to all of Asia, Africa and the Americas), personal relationships and communications have become more difficult for al Qaeda. With this difficulty comes degradation to al Qaeda's organization as well as opportunity for its enemies.

Recommendations and Conclusion

But in all this, the value of leadership never changes. And it's no secret we've learned a lot from a leader named David Petraeus. His watchwords -- learn and adapt -- have echoed from the streets of Baghdad to the halls of Washington. Dave, Marty and many others have fired the minds of generations to understand the true purpose of power as a force for good: to listen in order to understand; to treat all cultures as equals, with dignity and respect; to admit quickly when we are wrong; and to share risk with those we protect, all in order to build trust, for it is exactly that trust which empowers us to lead.

—Admiral Mike Mullen

The tenets of al Qaeda analyzed in this study—philosophy, culture, education and relationships—provide some insight that could be helpful in countering their efforts. The importance of spreading its radical Islamic ideology, coupled with efforts to harness the targeted populations to gain hegemony, drives this decentralized terror group's organization, operational focus and relationship management both internally and externally.

Recommendation #1

Conformity to societal norms is very important in Muslim society, but only to the extent that the society embraces traditional Islamic behavior. Within al Qaeda, individuals must adhere to

the organization's strict Islamic interpretations, particularly those in leadership positions. However, in an apparently expedience-focused approach to *jihad*, believers and associated organizations are only required to join the fight in general. The details as to how each *jihadist* practices their personal faith will be addressed when the worst infidel is defeated. Therefore, conformity is somewhat subjective for al Qaeda. America and its allies should attempt to identify leaders and members in al Qaeda based on their orthodoxy of Islamic adherence, paying particular attention to individual practice of the most fundamental aspects of Islam. For example, more pervasive, effective and loyal human intelligence on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan should work to integrate more completely into the local society. Through observation, eavesdropping and monitoring, this low-tech approach should provide more reliable and actionable information.

Recommendation #2

Al Qaeda's philosophy appears to be transitory and selective, making analysis difficult due to its inconsistencies. Bin Laden's shifting rhetoric about Palestine and Iraq, for example, does not provide a dependable reading on his core beliefs. In general terms, however, the philosophy of al Qaeda is certainly a return to Islamic hegemony on the Arabian Peninsula, and bin Laden's continual oratory in regards to the United States and Israel certainly offer appeal to segments of the Islamic faithful. In either case, the United States and coalition partners should continually evaluate al Qaeda's overt philosophy for subtle or explicit changes and refocus, as these may be efforts to expand membership and pose a wider threat. Current efforts to counter al Qaeda's message include US-funded al-Hurra television and Radio Sawa, both of which broadcast throughout the Middle East, and continued efforts to shine light on the radical philosophy of al Qaeda to more moderate Muslims should have an impact.

Recommendation #3

In Gramscian terms, a common language is important to hegemony. The language used to advance al Qaeda's philosophy has been consistently Arabic and English, and consistently radical and extreme. The interpretations of the meanings of the words within the complex language of Arabic take on much more significance, and al Qaeda's leadership captures this concept and exploits it. The meaning of the language is translated into common terms for better understanding by the masses and therefore becomes more effective in broadcasting the message they want to get across. Al Qaeda then converts these meanings into other languages using their own context to promote their mission and goals, recruit membership and warn their enemies. To combat the use of language and context, the United States should continue to compare al Qaeda's interpretations to commonly understood meanings within the Islamic world in an effort to discredit the message using every opportunity and media outlet. In addition, Islamic leaders within the Middle East and in major Western and Islamic countries should be more vocal in countering radical views through forums such as The Doha Debates. Both efforts are crucial to contradicting al Qaeda's views on faith in the Islamic world to bring better understanding of the religion, since failure to counter al Qaeda's message will dilute the peaceful and respectful intentions of Islam.

Recommendation #4

If the culture of radical Islam were stronger, if it were something in which common practitioners identified, it would have a much more effective and widespread influence on ideals and behavior. Since September 2001, Al Qaeda's message has been damaged by military action and criminal arrests against its members and associates. In addition, Muslims are becoming more open to debate, reflection and discussions about their religion. In this sense, the ability of

al Qaeda to extend their culture to other societies is questionable. Add in globalization and communications revolution, and al Qaeda's message is subject to further scrutiny, critique and weakening, all of which run counter to cultural change. America should be more proactive and lead the way in discrediting the culture of Islamic fundamentalism by promoting open and honest dialogue to expose the conflict these views have with basic human rights, economic progress and social development. One method to stimulate this change is to improve the cultural competency of American military forces who, in recent years, have become more visible in the Middle East.

Recommendation #5

Gramsci's ideas about educating the next generations are a radical departure from accepted Western ideals, since he views total immersion as a basic requirement—something one finds in *madrassas*. Interestingly, education on Gramsci's terms may not be likely to produce radical Islamist leaders in the al Qaeda model, but governments should continue their sensitivity in regards to its possibility. Perhaps more important may be what is happening in post-secondary education. Governments, particularly in Islamic societies, should put more pressure on colleges and universities to promote all views, rather than advocate a particular attitude. Only through debate in the rising generations will individuals become more aware of benefits and pitfalls of a particular view, a more complete picture that encourages a personal decision based on expanded knowledge. In addition, continued monitoring of messages broadcast via prominent mosques is a prudent practice, considering the influence imams have in Islamic society.

Recommendation #6

Relationships are developed as a result of education, culture, language, philosophy and conformity, a fact that al Qaeda depends on to remain effective. In Gramscian terms, relationships are crucial to hegemony and spreading ideology. Indeed, relationships within al

Qaeda as well as the groups with which it associates are critical to its operations, its replenishment of men and materiel, even its survival. Communications have become more complex for al Qaeda because of its status as the most dangerous terrorist group in the world. With this difficulty comes degradation to al Qaeda's organization and its ability to initiate and develop personal relationships. Persistent emphasis by the United States and all enemies of al Qaeda to interrupt, degrade and debilitate all forms of communication (including *hawala*) should continue so that the network continues to be hindered in its ability to foster relationships and stretch its reach further. Again, a better human intelligence network is required, as is more cooperation from nations in the region. Western military and political leaders likely recognize the importance of personal relationships to their own work, and should advocate and direct more determined action to disrupt al Qaeda's ability to develop and foster those bonds.

Conclusion

This analysis should be considered as another contribution of needed research and examination of America's most unpredictable and dangerous current enemy. While some consistency with Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and ideology within al Qaeda do exist, this organization continues to shift its subordinate areas of focus to transient issues that appear to promote their cause. Other analyses of the organization, operational actions and goals, and personal and organizational relationships may yield results. For example, al Qaeda could be evaluated in terms of Sun Tsu's *The Art of War*, the rise and reign of Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini, or the totalitarian socialist Joseph Stalin. The comparison to the methods described in *The Art of War* may provide insight to the approaches and actions that al Qaeda exploits. In discussions comparing al Qaeda to the emergence and governing of Mussolini or Stalin, one may find certain vulnerabilities either within the organization or the population studied. What

remains important is that evaluation of al Qaeda be persistent and relentless toward the goal of finding and terminating its existence.

One point is certain: al Qaeda is focused on ending the United States presence on the Arabian Peninsula and hegemony in the world, and will use all its abilities, ideas and energies to generate this change. Only through persistence and patience will America and its allies defeat Osama bin Laden, his leadership circle and the organization known as al Qaeda.

Notes

- ¹ Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam"
- ² Lenin, *What is to be Done?*
- ³ Mastroianni, "Hegemony in Antonio Gramsci"
- ⁴ Augelli and Murphy, *America's Quest for Supremacy*, 21
- ⁵ Burke, "Antonio Gramsci, schooling and education."
- ⁶ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 11
- ⁷ Stillo, "Gramsci"
- ⁸ Burke, "Antonio Gramsci, schooling and education."
- ⁹ Cuneo, "Hegemony in Gramsci's Original Prison Notebooks"
- ¹⁰ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 59
- ¹¹ Ibid., 65-66
- ¹² Burke, "Antonio Gramsci"
- ¹³ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 129
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 126-131
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 132
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 132
- ¹⁷ Lenin, "What is to be Done?"
- ¹⁸ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 77
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 124
- ²⁰ Augelli and Murphy, *America's Quest*, 28
- ²¹ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 59-60
- ²² Ibid., 60
- ²³ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 140
- ²⁴ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 59
- ²⁵ Ibid., 59
- ²⁶ Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 75
- ²⁷ Esposito, *The Islamic Threat?*, 29
- ²⁸ Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, 26-27
- ²⁹ Ibid., 29
- ³⁰ Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 9
- ³¹ Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, 30
- ³² Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 22
- ³³ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 22
- ³⁴ Ibid., 55
- ³⁵ Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 44
- ³⁶ Jones, *Defeating Terrorist Groups*, 5
- ³⁷ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 64
- ³⁸ Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism*, 78
- ³⁹ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 59
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 196
- ⁴¹ Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 27-28
- ⁴² Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 60

Notes

- ⁴³ Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism*, 12
- ⁴⁴ The Doha Debates, “About the Debates”
- ⁴⁵ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 132
- ⁴⁶ Bergen, “The Madrassa Scapegoat,” *The Washington Quarterly*
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 66
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 68-69
- ⁵⁰ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 163-4
- ⁵¹ Jones, *Defeating Terrorist Networks*, 12
- ⁵² Ibid., 14

Appendix 1

The ideals of al Qaeda had its beginnings in Islamic activist groups, most notably the Palestinian struggles with Israel, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the *mujahedeen* who defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. While the actions of these groups definitely attracted the founders of al Qaeda, their foundational beliefs, interpretations of the Quran and adherence to the lifestyle of a proper Muslim, including personal *jihad*, cemented their principles and values.

Abdallah Azzam

Abdallah Azzam, born in pre-Israel Transjordan, acquired his Islamic beliefs not only through membership in the Muslim Brotherhood, but also in the company he kept while earning his degree to teach. As a student at Damascus University, he spent time learning from and debating clerics who would one day become leading religious authorities. During this period and subsequent studies earning his master's degree in Islamic law at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, his formal and informal education in traditional concepts in Islam such as earning unclean money as a worker in a secular government and the concept of *jihad* against Israel provided him the inspiration to commit his life to defending his version of Islam. He fought as a leader in the Palestinian *jihad*, turning his back on his father when he demanded a return to teaching, an act that cemented Azzam's belief that parental permission to participate in *jihad* is not required, as it is an individual duty. This concept was to become a central tenet of al Qaeda's expectations for all Muslims, crucial to uniting Islam against its enemies. Azzam eventually earned his doctorate

in Islamic law, acquiring not only a prestigious degree from a top university, but also many connections that would help him during the Afghanistan conflict with the Soviet Union.¹

During Azzam's time in supporting the Aghani *mujahedeen*, when he was also teaching at the Islamic University in Islamabad, he became disenchanted with the progress of the *jihad*. As a result, his book *The Defense of Muslim Territories* advocated the individual responsibility of *jihad*, which led to his break from the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. He also quit his teaching post and moved to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to establish the Service Bureau in cooperation with Osama bin Laden. Financial support and recruiting through the Service Bureau took the *jihad* to a higher level. In fact, as a traveling fundraiser he even visited the United States on a number of occasions, all the while advocating support (both financially and in the individual responsibility of *jihad*) to the conflict in Afghanistan. Azzam's influence was seen in three major areas: "first, the political dimension and [his] role in moving the Afghan conflict from the regional to the global scale; second, the organizational aspect, which highlights [him] as 'the father of Afghan Arabs'; (sic) and third, the ideological dimension, with [him] becoming the preeminent theoretician of global jihad."² Azzam died alongside two of his sons as a result of a car bombing in 1989, and theories of responsibility for his death range from Osama bin Laden's orders to a plot by the Americans and Israelis.

Ayman al-Zawahiri

A prominent Muslim thinker of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, was very influential on the man who would create the orthodoxy of al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian-born surgeon. Qutb had studied in the United States during the 1940s and returned to Egypt changed by, as he describes it, "moral decadence."³ When Qutb was jailed and tortured with many other members of the Muslim Brotherhood, he changed his beliefs from peacefully working to change

the nation's laws toward Islamic law to a radicalized belief that the world was separated into Islam and *jahiliyya*, meaning humanity before Islam.⁴ Zawahiri's beliefs were forever changed after reading two of Qutb's books, *Signposts* and *In the Shade of the Quran*. Zawahiri joined a cell of the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1970s, and was involved with the coalition that assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981 after he signed the peace agreement with Israel. Many Islamic leaders in Egypt were jailed following this brazen act, and Zawahiri's experience was eerily similar to Qutb's, in that he was subsequently beaten and tortured while imprisoned and developed into a leader in radical Islam.

Zawahiri emerged from prison in 1984 and made his way to Afghanistan to join the *jihad*. Rather than pledge loyalty to Abdallah Azzam, the "father and the theoretician of *jihad* against the Soviets," he was drawn to another subdued yet admired leader: Osama bin Laden. Through this relationship he helped establish the leadership and structure of al Qaeda.

Osama bin Laden

Much has been written about Osama bin Laden, for obvious reasons; his face is the current image of terrorism, much like Abu Nidal in the 1980s and Yasser Arafat in the 1970s. What sets bin Laden apart, however, are the spectacular nature of his acts of terrorism and his ability to connect the ideals of Islamic extremism to a worldwide audience. A man with this wide of an impact had uncharacteristic beginnings, the son of a construction tycoon in Saudi Arabia who eventually divorced bin Laden's Syrian-born mother. Interestingly, bin Laden's father made arrangements for his mother to marry a fellow businessman, apparently a common act by Muhammad bin Laden. This situation, however, probably contributed to the development of Osama's "desire for revenge and recognition," because he probably felt an entitlement to a better home life.⁵

As a schoolboy in the suburbs of Riyadh, the most remarkable trait of bin Laden was his unusual interest in Islam and Islamic behavior. His concern for society grew as he did, particularly his anxiety about the impact that the nation's newfound wealth from oil was having on his country's culture and religious traditions. This view on society was probably the foundation that led bin Laden toward the action that the Muslim Brotherhood promised. In 1976, he apparently helped finance the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's attempts to overthrow the Syrian government. In the early 1980s, bin Laden became involved in the Afghan *jihad*, first as a financier, then as a contact who could funnel donations where they were needed. His position in society as a son of Muhammed bin Laden made his efforts in the 1980s successful in Saudi Arabia, which was working to restore its reputation in Islam. Bin Laden became something of a cult hero, guiding those who wanted to support the cause financially and recruiting others to join the *mujahedeen* in *jihad*.

In the mid-1980s, bin Laden joined forces with Abdallah Azzam to form the Service Bureau, discussed above. Bin Laden was the businessman of the organization, financing operations and communicating from a distance. But for bin Laden, the war in Afghanistan was more than just fighting an imperial power; it represented the struggle that Muslims face when invaders attempt to overthrow the Islamic way of life. He saw his involvement in Afghanistan not as a mercenary but as a freedom fighter coming to the defense of Islam; in short, he was joining the *jihad* in the struggle to defend the only true and correct way of life. As the war in Afghanistan began to wind down, so did the relationship between bin Laden and Azzam. Bin Laden's acceptance of funds from drug lords and volunteers with uncertain pasts was contrary to Azzam's calm and controlled organizational habit of verifying the authenticity sources and personal motives. The two men grew apart, especially as bin Laden became closer with Zawahiri. Where Azzam

preferred something that resembled a political party of a certain sort, bin Laden was not so discriminating.⁶ He and Zawahiri, with the ability to speak to and motivate both elites and the uneducated, provided the origin and structure of “the base” which became known as al Qaeda.

At this point in his life, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia in the shadow of Saddam Hussein’s pending invasion into Kuwait. Prior to the Iraqi attacks, bin Laden had been floating the idea of removing the Baathists from power; however, when Kuwait was invaded, he became even more angry at the Saudi government’s appeal to the United States to protect his homeland and free Kuwait. Bin Laden saw the presence of non-Muslim military forces on the Arabian Peninsula as “a desecration of the Muslim Holy Land,” and has held the Saudi government responsible ever since—a belief that led to his expulsion from his homeland and further radicalization of his Sunni beliefs.⁷

Al Qaeda’s Growth

Al Qaeda uses the ideologies developed and preached in Sunni Islamic extremism, which are based on the idea of a “return” to religious political system in which the Quran, the teachings of Muhammad and the guidance of recognized religious leaders govern societal and individual behavior.⁸ Bin Laden and Zawahiri worked to create a more effective organizational structure of al Qaeda, including declared goals for the group. The declaration in February 1998 of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders was the first attempt to expand *jihad* beyond a country’s national borders. The ensuing coordinated attacks against United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania was the first of its kind and signaled to the world the expansive network that made up al Qaeda. Islamic extremists were certainly behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, as well as Khobar Towers, but a trans-national, simultaneous, coordinated attack demonstrated al Qaeda’s remarkable advancement in tactics and strategy.

Bin Laden, although targeted by the subsequent cruise missile attacks into Afghanistan, took full advantage of the situation and began not only spreading al Qaeda's message personally and through his spokesmen, but also apparently started taking advantage of their loose associations with other Islamic radical groups. Al Qaeda's message could be seen on television and radio, in the newspaper and magazines, even on this new technology known as the internet. The reach of his group became truly global, as did its message: force the infidels (United States military) from Saudi Arabia and bring about true change to the region's culture. In other words, al Qaeda sought the founding of "Islam itself as a global entity," one that was a return to Islam under the successors to Mohammed.⁹ To effect this revolution, however, al Qaeda would "defend" Islam by following through on a long-held threat: attack on Americans *in* the United States.

The worst single attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the worst terrorist attack ever, happened on a bright, sunny morning in New York City and Washington, D.C. Although al Qaeda did not immediately claim responsibility, intelligence analysis quickly connected the group with passengers aboard the airplanes. Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda had followed through on a long-held threat and killed indiscriminately—a trait that has been ingrained in the group's culture. The decadence and indulgences of Western culture, behavior and imperialism, in the radical Islamist's view, is what brings on this death and destruction—the whole reason for *jihad*. Sayyid Qutb references the Quran and explains: "After annihilating the tyrannical force, whether political or racial tyranny, or domination of one class over the other within the same race, Islam establishes a new social, economic and political system, in which all men and women enjoy real freedom."¹⁰ A conflict with the United States was considered inevitable in the view of bin Laden, and he welcomed it—particularly in spectacular fashion, leading to the attacks on September 11, 2001. By facing what he believes is a mortal enemy and

danger to Islam, bin Laden saw the opportunity to confront and defeat a power he viewed as weaker than the one defeated in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Using the same techniques— asymmetric warfare as a means of attrition—al Qaeda was to entice America onto the battlefield. However, Afghanistan’s Taliban and the al Qaeda forces were quickly defeated and chased into the Afghan-Pakistan border, where the conflict remains today. The United States turned its attention to Iraq in 2003, and that conflict dominated the political and military landscape from 2003 to 2008. With a new president in 2009, America now turns its attention back to Afghanistan to enable the civil authority, as well as finding and eliminating the threat that the resurgent Taliban and al Qaeda pose to the region’s (and America’s) security.

Al Qaeda’s movement, then, was supposed to start with the immediate *jihad*, namely Afghanistan, then spread to the Arabian peninsula so that the United States will, in Zawahiri’s words in November 2008, “withdraw from the lands of the Muslims and refrain from stealing their treasures and interfering in their affairs.”¹¹ In doing so, bin Laden and al Qaeda were working toward re-establishing what could arguably be called a restoration of the Caliphate, the rule of Islam in all aspects of life. While bin Laden has not claimed to be the Caliph-in-waiting, he clearly wants to establish the conditions that will effect this revolution. His methods have the appearance of infiltrating the populations to influence conformity to norms, philosophy, language, culture, education and relationships according to Islamic law, traditions and practice.

Notes

¹ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 88

² Ibid., 97

³ Ibid., 149

⁴ Ibid., 150

⁵ Ibid., 13

⁶ Ibid., 20

⁷ Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 160

⁸ O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, 21-22

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⁹ Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 28

¹⁰ El-Shall, *Salafī Utopia*

¹¹ Open Source Center, *Al-Sahab Releases New Message*

Appendix 2

Conformity

The discussion on Gramsci has a basic level where people fall in line with the norms of their segment of society. In this way, Gramsci notes, “For his own conception of the world a man always belongs to a certain grouping, and precisely to that of all the social elements who share the same ways of thinking and working.”¹ A person will comply with the ideals, expectations and responsibilities within that society and, absent critical thought, seek to remain in a zone of comfort. The social group is self-policing, using customs and historical example to simultaneously retain habits and mores, yet adjusting some values and behavior as time changes. To gain membership one is either born into the group or joins as a matter of circumstance and acceptance, such as physical or economic relocation. Conformity could be considered the most basic element of group behavior. However, the goal in Gramscian thought is not conformity within the social strata that exists; rather, the ideal is to create conformity within a new Socialist hegemony.

Muslims are a very conformity-centered society in that the religion of Islam permeates an individual’s entire existence. From daily prayer rituals and family matters to business and bank dealings, a Muslim’s life is guided and regulated by the social and political immersion that is a life in Islam. Bernard Lewis discusses this population in these terms: “For more than a thousand years, Islam provided the only universally acceptable set of rules and principles for the regulation of public and social life...Islamic political notions and attitudes remained a profound

and pervasive influence. In recent years there have been many signs that these notions and attitudes may be returning, albeit in modified forms, to their previous dominance.”²

Al Qaeda espouses the conformity of its organization, from bin Laden and his deputies to the individual *mujahedeen* on the front lines of the battlefield. The combined actions of the group are considered crucial to success and further recruitment in the resistance against Western influences, the United States in particular. Muslims are beseeched to recognize what bin Laden and Zawahiri see as important aspects of the faith, which is to make *jihad* in every instance where the true and correct practice of Islam is not present. The dichotomy of their statements, however, shows a real inner conflict of their views. On the one hand is the denigration of governments in Muslim states, such as Saudi Arabia, where al Qaeda believes the government has allowed infidels onto sacred land. In fact, one of the primary reasons for bin Laden’s banishment from Saudi Arabia was his “manifestos condemning the Saudi authorities,” a move that permanently altered his approach to *jihad*.³ Conversely, bin Laden has repeatedly implored Muslims to “ignore internal differences” and even praised Shiite Iran for its revolution against the Shah.⁴

The facts presented above makes solidarity in al Qaeda an interesting study. The message presented by al Qaeda in terms of assimilation depends on the audience. For example, conformity and unity of Muslims are important to al Qaeda’s revolutionary struggle, as Zawahiri states: “Unity against the common enemy: the *jihad* movement must realize that half the road to victory is attained through union, unity, rising above minor matters, self-sacrifice, and putting the interest of Islam above personal conflicts.”⁵ When one considers the history of Islam, in particular the political and military struggles within the faith, however, the understanding of change to certain loyalties becomes clear. For expedience sake, bin Laden advocates a common

goal that all Muslims should support. In the long term, though, the unity of all branches will not survive, as differences are traced back to the beginnings of the faith. The temporary nature of certain aspects in Islamic conformity, such as concern only for common worship practices rather than specific differences between Sunni and Shiite beliefs, serves al Qaeda in the short term against the distant enemy. At the same time, determination to emphasize the faith in general has the potential to establish conditions needed to restore a Sunni Caliph to power on the Arabian Peninsula.

Conformity, therefore, is somewhat subjective for al Qaeda. For the core members of its group, individuals must adhere to the organization's strict Islamic interpretations; however, in an apparently expedience-focused approach to *jihad*, believers are only required to join the fight in general, and the details as to how each practices their personal faith will be addressed when the worst infidel is defeated. The next section is connected to this position: while Gramsci believes that associations of convenience are useful in power struggles; of more importance is the philosophical system that should permeate the society to inspire the masses.⁶

Language

Gramsci believed that a limited grasp of language led to a limited ability to understand the world around a person. For example, a northern Italian would be hard pressed to comprehend the different modes of thinking of a southern Italian or Sicilian. Not only is the world around a person limited; so too would the opportunities to partner with those outside the region or nation. However, the key to Islam is simple: learn Arabic.

A common language to al Qaeda and its associates is Arabic, as this is the language in which the Quran was written. As with any language, the meanings of some words take on more significance in their original writing than when translated into, say, English. Take the word

jihad, for example. In the Quran it is usually used in the form of and translated as “striving in the path of God,” but the specifics of the word have been open to interpretation. Some believe *jihad* is a moral struggle within oneself, a battle to live always following the Quran, while others take *jihad* literally as a physical battle against infidels, apostates, rebels and bandits.⁷ The distinction is crucial to understanding Islam and living a proper life as a Muslim. When a proper authority issues a *fatwa* that declares *jihad*, all Muslims are expected to follow these instructions. Now, *jihad* can have an even further meaning: personal support or community support to the struggle. Community support for *jihad* can mean financially sustaining the effort, or sending supplies and resources to further the *jihad*. Personal support to *jihad* means all that are able must come to the fight. Properly understanding the language used by al Qaeda, particularly in terms of accurate translation, is crucial to understanding the underlying philosophy and goals.

Within the Arabic-speaking world, the connection between language and understanding can be considered familiar, particularly when listening to a recording of al Qaeda’s leadership. Differences arise when al Qaeda’s message is translated into another language, although bin Laden, Zawahiri and the mass media generally translate into English. The reasoning for using English is two-fold: first, the primary adversary for al Qaeda is the United States; second, and more historically significant, is the fact that Great Britain was a colonial power in South and Southwest Asia, and English is commonly understood if not spoken outright.

The primary concern, then, is not so much a language barrier, as Arabic and English are familiar to the audience, but more in relation to the proper understanding of what the Quran means. This issue is best summed up, in terms of the three most radical and fundamentalist interpretations of the Quran (al Qaeda, Saudi Arabia’s government and the ruling Iranian

hierarchy), by Bernard Lewis in *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, where he writes:

All these different extremist groups sanctify their action through pious references to Islamic texts, notably the Qur'an (sic) and the traditions of the Prophet, and all three claim to represent a truer, purer, and more authentic Islam than that currently practiced by the vast majority of Muslims and endorsed by most though not all of the religious leadership. They are, however, highly selective in their choice and interpretation of the sacred texts. In considering the sayings of the Prophet, for example, they discard the time-honored methods developed by the jurists and theologians for testing the accuracy and authenticity of orally transmitted traditions, and instead accept or reject even sacred texts according to whether they support or contradict their own dogmatic and militant positions. Some even go so far as to dismiss some Qur'anic (sic) verses as "revoked" or "abrogated." The argument used to justify this is that verses revealed during the early years of the Prophet's mission may be superseded by later, presumably more mature revelations.⁸

While a common language, in Gramscian terms, may be important to hegemony, the concept has a slightly different focus in al Qaeda's world. The interpretations of the meanings of the words *within* the complex language of Arabic take on much more significance, and al Qaeda's leadership captures this concept and exploits it. Within Arabic, al Qaeda translates the *meaning* of the language for better understanding by the masses and therefore becomes more effective in broadcasting the *message* they want to get across. Converting these meanings into other languages becomes simply a matter of the context that al Qaeda uses when promoting their mission and goals, recruiting membership and warning their enemies. Language has its importance, to be sure, but what al Qaeda truly seeks to change is the culture of the state, the region and the world.

Notes

¹ Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 58-59

² Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 13

³ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 22

⁴ Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 53

⁵ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 202

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⁶ Augelli and Murphy, *America's Quest For Supremacy*, 120

⁷ Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 30-31

⁸ Ibid., 138-9

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